

Washington: Liquor privatization - Another negative consequence

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After liquor sales were privatized June 1, a lot of people complained about the often higher prices, which incorporated new taxes required under voter-approved Initiative 1183. Others said the increase was well worth the greater convenience of more locations selling liquor virtually around the clock.

But one point hardly anyone is talking about is how privatization has narrowed choice and made it much harder to locate more obscure items.

For instance, before privatization went into effect, I was looking for a liqueur called Creme de Violette after reading an article about a famous old cocktail using it. The state liquor store I usually patronized didn't carry it, but the clerk looked it up for me in the state database and said another store not far away carried it. He even offered to call over and have it held for me.

I can't imagine anything close to that would happen if I walked into a supermarket looking for that same liqueur. For one thing, there's no similar, centralized database that would allow a clerk (if you could find one knowledgeable enough to help) at one store to see if the product was available at another location - and especially at a competitor's.

I've looked at the selection available at several stores now, and it's pretty slim compared to what was stocked at the state liquor stores. Anyone who wants a big selection to choose from will have to wait for the liquor superstores like BevMo to open. A woman who answered the phone at the Tacoma BevMo said it would open for business "next week," but she couldn't be more specific.

Unfortunately, whoever selected that site - across from Costco on South 37th Street - must be from out of town. The area is a traffic nightmare now; think what it'll be like when the liquor superstore opens.

With all the empty retail space available in the South Sound, you'd think BevMo could have found a more convenient location. Hopefully the other liquor superstore that has announced plans to come here (Total Wine & More) won't make the same mistake.